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OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Letter dated 16 June 1997 from the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the Seoul Declaration on Environmental Ethics,** which was adopted at World Environment Day, held at Seoul on 5 June 1997 and hosted by the Government of the Republic of Korea and the United Nations Environment Programme.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and the Declaration circulated as a document of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, under item 8 of the provisional agenda.

(Signed) PARK Soo Gil
Permanent Representative

* A/S-19/1.

** Circulated in the language of submission only.

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ANNEX

World Environment Day 1997

Seoul Declaration on Environmental Ethics

~ People's Pledge ~

Preamble

As humanity moves toward the 21st century, we are left with no choice but to reconsider the values and principles that underlie our relationship with the Earth. Over the course of history, we see that lifestyles and ways of thinking have changed dramatically, having made tremendous progress in science and technology, economic growth, and material wealth. These changes have enhanced the quality of life for some, but have diminished it for others. We also have witnessed the continuation of unsustainable development practices and lifestyles which have detrimentally affected the natural environment and indeed our very lives.

Clearly, a fundamental change is required. The global community is in need of a set of guidelines that would allow equitable access to the environmental benefits of the planet, without exceeding its carrying capacity. We must come to an understanding that the current global environmental crisis is a result of value systems, driven by human greed and excessive materialism, and the mistaken complacency that science and technology would solve all our problems. Unless we reexamine our values and beliefs, such conditions will further environmental degradation, and ultimately lead to the collapse of natural systems that support life. Reevaluating what constitutes sustainable development and the proactive role humankind must play to realize it is the only sensible course of action.

We believe that in order to enhance the quality of life, and to avoid wholesale ecological destruction, a deeper understanding of life and the formulation of a new system of environmental ethics are required.

The key is to recognize that humans and the natural environment are interdependent and part of a larger entity, the "Whole-Life-System." We must therefore understand that the environment is not a resource for exploitation, but is a partner for life. Human society must also begin to better understand itself as a collective and cohesive body whose very welfare is dependent on the welfare of all its constituents -- the cultural, ethnic, national, and generational groups. Such an ecological perspective on nature and on ourselves constitutes the best hope of solving environmental crises.

The critical decisions that we make must be determined by our own sense of moral strength, nobility of spirit, and a reverence for life. To this end, we require an ethical paradigm based on social equity, respect for diversity, and a culture of cooperation and shared responsibility in preserving the integrity of the Whole-Life-System.

In recognition of these considerations, on this date of June 5, 1997, marking the 25th anniversary of the Stockholm Declaration and the 5th anniversary of the Rio Declaration, we gather here in Seoul, Korea to declare this "Seoul Declaration on Environmental Ethics" in order to establish an evolving framework of ideals, principles, and guidelines to sustain life on Earth.

Principles

Earth's Whole-Life-System refers to a totality in which human beings, together with other life forms, natural elements and forces, co-exist interdependently as a cohesive entity. The viability of the Whole-Life-System is essential to and dependent upon the very existence and integrity of all of its constituent components, and no species has an exclusive right to Earth's environment. All human decisions ought to be made and implemented on the premise that the existence of all life, including human life, can be sustained only when the integrity and well-being of the Whole-Life-System is preserved.

1. Creating a Spiritual Culture

The industrial civilization has brought about an abundance of goods and services for humankind, but also an obsession for materialism and a distortion of human values. These adverse effects on society have reached a critical threshold. We must act now to find the proper balance between materialistic pursuits and the need for spiritual fulfillment, in order to embrace life more fully.

For thousands of years, many indigenous groups worldwide have been practicing the ethics of living in harmony with their natural environment. It is necessary that we reevaluate the significance of their cultures and traditions and incorporate their knowledge and expertise into our own.

2. Achieving Environmental Equity

Planet Earth is the common home for all of us. We must all strive to share equitably the benefits and burdens resulting from the use of the environment. In particular, equity should exist among nations, ethnic groups, and generations of humankind in the distribution of the social and economic benefits from the Earth's environment.

A perspective on environmental ethics enables us to recognize that all people have the same rights to a secure environment as well as the right to pursue individual happiness and prosperity. Respecting such rights is crucial since the welfare and quality of life of every individual contribute to the survival and well-being of the Whole-Life-System. Furthermore, because in many cases environmental degradation is long-term and cumulative, precautionary policies guided by considerations of equity must be implemented to safeguard the rights of future generations.

3. Greening Science and Technology

Science and technology have played a critical role in human history and will be one of the key determining factors in shaping a sustainable future. However, the impacts of technological development and their applications have also become so significant that they could threaten the stability of the ecosystem and human society. Therefore, a rethinking of the expectations and responsibilities of the scientific community is required.

The principles that should guide the development and use of technology must take into account the finite carrying capacity of nature and the intricate interconnectedness of the Whole-Life-System. The development of environmentally-friendly technologies and the

accumulation of environmental information must be encouraged. In addition, technologies should be subject to rigorous assessment before and after their application to avoid irreparable damage to the environment. The results of such efforts should be exchanged worldwide in order to facilitate joint efforts aimed toward ensuring a more sustainable future.

4. Sharing Responsibilities

All members of human society are responsible for maintaining the integrity of the global environment as a Whole-Life-System. We must accept our accountability and fulfill our responsibilities to protect the integrity of the global environment with determination in our everyday lives. These individual efforts can be enhanced through building networks within and among groups of civil society and government, industry and business, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). With such cooperation and coordinated participation, appropriate policies can be developed and implemented effectively.

Guidelines for Action

Governments

1. ***Policy Coordination.*** Sectoral, economic and other policies must contribute to preserving the sustainability of the Whole-Life-System. To that end, governments at all levels must ensure that their policies are the result of well coordinated strategies among all relevant government agencies.

2. ***Precautionary Approach.*** Development projects must be subject to Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs). Any project that is expected to have significant adverse environmental effects must be accompanied by appropriate precautionary mitigation measures and/or action plans to counter all such impacts. As declared in Rio, where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.

3. ***Accessibility.*** Policies and programs concerning development and environmental preservation must reflect the interests and informed judgement of all stakeholders. To achieve full participation, information pertaining to these policies must not only be made available to the public, but done so in an accommodating manner to allow sufficient time for public comment to be introduced and incorporated into such policies.

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4. ***Support for Environmentally-Sound Technology.*** Governments must support the development of environmentally-sound technologies for all sectors of the economy and encourage their application. To this end, all governments must endeavor to make the necessary financial commitments to subsidize research, development, and use of the technologies where appropriate. Governments should create enabling conditions and incentives for the development and application of such technologies, as well as for the exchange of the scientific and technical information which result from such development.

5. ***Equity.*** Benefits and burdens from development and environmental policies must be distributed fairly among members of society in order to promote social and economic equity. In particular, such policies must help ensure that women, children, elderly, the poor and disadvantaged, indigenous groups, and the physically challenged, are empowered to share in the benefits resulting from environmental and development policies. Governments must also promote suitable conditions for active participation in the decision-making process by all stakeholders.

6. ***Environmental Education.*** Education, especially from an early age, has a significant effect on how people form attitudes toward the environment, and is thus crucial. Educational programs designed to enhance awareness of environmental issues and ethics must be developed and applied at all levels of society through all available practical means.

Governments should make special efforts to financially support such educational programs.

7. ***International Cooperation.*** Nations share common responsibilities for preserving Earth's environment. This requires active involvement in regional and international cooperative efforts and collaborative implementation of environmentally-sound policies, while complying with established multilateral agreements. Moreover, in order to further international cooperation, newly developed scientific information as well as experience in environmental and development policy-making should be exchanged worldwide to facilitate efforts for global environmental protection and improvement and to provide early warning of impending problems.

Citizens

8. ***Environmentally-Sound Lifestyles.*** All members of society must cultivate lifestyles that avoid waste and excess. Bearing in mind that Earth's resources are limited, each person must avoid a culture of extravagant material consumption and pursue ways to preserve the planet by means of environmentally-sound consumption patterns. Each individual can make a difference in his or her consumption patterns, and when accumulated collectively, the positive effect can be tremendous.

9. ***Active Involvement.*** Individuals are encouraged to participate both morally and politically in all levels in the decision-making processes which affect the environment in order to improve the

quality of decision-making, avoid corruption, and ensure that their interests are properly represented. Broad-based participation will accordingly guide government policies to be equitable and well-balanced in both direction and purpose.

10. ***Caring and Compassion.*** Every person is encouraged to assist those who are environmentally, economically, and socially disadvantaged and extend the boundary of community to include all living beings.

Religious and Faith Communities

11. ***Spiritual View.*** The scale and magnitude of environmental problems are such that they must be recognized as having a religious as well as scientific dimension. Efforts to safeguard the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred. Religious and spiritual leaders must accept a responsibility to make known the full dimensions of this challenge. The cause of environmental integrity and justice must occupy a position of utmost priority for people of faith.

NGOs

12. ***Public Awareness.*** An important role of NGOs is to heightén public awareness by organizing and maintaining environmental instruction and guidance. NGOs must amplify their efforts to educate and train individuals, organizations, and public officials so that the message of conserving the Whole-Life-System can be spread through

multiple channels. In addition, NGOs must take initiatives by way of projects and clean-up activities to protect and improve the environment.

13. ***Role of "Watchdog" and Liaison.*** NGOs must serve the role of "watchdog", be prepared to assess and evaluate policies, programs, and projects, and where appropriate, propose alternatives. Furthermore, in order to serve the role of liaison between and among governments, industrial sectors, and civil society, NGOs must promote active dialogue between the stakeholders.

14. ***Specialization and Coordination.*** Given the increasing complexities of the environmental issues, NGOs could benefit from further specialization within their field of expertise. They are also encouraged to build coalitions with NGOs from other disciplines to enhance their effectiveness. Forming cooperative networks will further promote the exchange of information, knowledge, and expertise.

15. ***Regional Environmental Activism.*** The increasingly effective role of regional environmental activism initiated by local citizens and communities is critical to the protection of the environment and ecosystems. With this in mind, regional NGOs should make an effort to form coordinated and interactive alliances with citizens and communities.

Industry and Business Sectors

16. ***Environmentally-Friendly Business Practices.*** The industrial sector must actively apply eco-efficiency principles in order to

use less energy and materials for the same amount of output and to reduce emissions and waste. This invites, inter alia, widespread adoption of environmentally-friendly production technologies, efficient use of materials and energy, an increased use of recycled materials and renewable energy, minimization of harmful emissions, and the productive use of wastes. The financial and insurance sectors must also increasingly foster environmentally-sound investment.

17. ***Extended Responsibilities.*** In developing and manufacturing their products, all industrial sectors must recognize that their responsibilities do not stop at the end of the production line, but extend to all phases of a product's lifecycle, including its disposal.

18. ***Environmental Management System.*** Industries must examine the undue pressures they may be exerting on the environment by means of regularly timed audits of their business practices. Accordingly, industries must make a determined effort to minimize such pressures on the environment by preventing and abating pollution. Industries must take measures to incorporate the costs of pollution-prevention and mitigation technologies as part of their normal production activities.

International Organizations

19. ***Monitoring.*** International organizations must monitor the global ecosystem and major changes therein on a regular basis including, but not limited to, global climate change, ozone depletion, and the extinction of species. Transboundary movements of hazardous wastes

and transboundary conflicts over freshwater rights and use should likewise be monitored.

20. ***Developing Policy Alternatives.*** International organizations must address global and transboundary environmental problems by analyzing and developing policy alternatives, as well as by facilitating cooperation and agreement among nations, to resolve such problems.

21. ***Conflict Resolution.*** International organizations should facilitate the prevention and resolution of environmental disputes and promote cooperative environmental policies. Furthermore, international organizations must promote recognition of differing national environmental standards, policies, and institutions among nations in order to reduce international disputes and to promote international cooperation in trade and investment.

22. ***Strengthening Ties.*** International organizations must play a key role in strengthening international and regional cooperation, as well as in fostering information exchange through which the benefits of experience and technological expertise of developed countries can be shared with developing countries.

23. ***Cooperative Development.*** International organizations must work together with developed countries in providing both financial and technical assistance to developing countries, and in particular, to the least developed countries, to assist in breaking the cycle of poverty and environmental deterioration.

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Academic and Research Institutions

24. ***Research and Development.*** Academic and research institutions must fulfill their role of advancing scientific knowledge of the environment and developing mitigative, pollution-preventive, and less resource-consumptive technologies. In so doing, scientists and engineers must exercise high moral discipline and maximum precaution in their research, bearing in mind the potentially adverse effects their research may exert on the environment.

25. ***Interdisciplinary Approach.*** Science and technology alone cannot resolve the impending environmental crisis. An interdisciplinary approach, which includes other branches of academic endeavors such as the humanities and social sciences, is needed to develop programs for a better understanding of the increasingly complex environmental problems.

Communications and Mass Media

26. ***Publicizing Environmental Issues.*** The media must fulfill their responsibility to convey and report with accuracy the state of the environment and related environmental policies. With their ability to heighten public awareness of such issues, mass media and the entertainment industry should make additional efforts to publicize environmental success stories and issues of interest which may inspire others to action.

27. ***Utilizing Electronic Media.*** The new electronic media open a new dimension of unprecedented interactive and fast-paced exchange of information. Therefore, efforts should be made to utilize these new forms of media to facilitate communication of environmental information and active participation of people throughout the world, in pursuit of preserving the Whole-Life-System.

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OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Letter dated 23 June 1997 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i.
of the Permanent Mission of Paraguay to the United Nations
addressed to the Secretary-General

On behalf of the Republic of Paraguay, which is the coordinator pro tempore of the Rio Group, I have the honour to request you to have the text of the Declaration of the Rio Group distributed as a United Nations document as part of the documentation to be considered during the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly.

(Signed) Ramón DÍAZ-PEREIRA
Minister
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

* A/S-19/1.

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ANNEX

Declaration of the Rio Group

We, the member countries of the Permanent Mechanism for Consultation and Policy Coordination - Rio Group - state our intention to continue to make progress towards sustainable development by carrying out the decisions and commitments laid down in the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. To this end, we shall step up our efforts to continue to promote economic and social development as well as environmental protection.

Five years after the Earth Summit, we note some progress towards achieving its objectives, particularly with regard to institution-building, the codification of environmental law, public participation, and the process aimed at reversing the trends in environmental problems. Nevertheless, the general outlook for economic and social development is no better than in 1992. The environment continues to deteriorate and major environmental problems are still deeply rooted in economic structures.

Therefore, aware of the needs to avoid greater environmental degradation and, consequently, a deterioration of human health, we reaffirm our determination to change certain production and consumption patterns in order to help bring about a better life for all.

We believe that international cooperation and dialogue should be guided by principle 7 of Agenda 21, which says that States have common but differentiated responsibilities.

We therefore urge the developed countries, cooperation agencies and international financial institutions to strengthen their support for the developing countries in accordance with the commitments entered into at the Earth Summit, especially with regard to the transfer of technology and financial resources. To that end, we urge compliance with the provisions of chapter 33 of Agenda 21 concerning official development assistance and the implementation of innovative financing mechanisms.

We also believe that the work of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development should be oriented towards the promotion of Agenda 21 as a whole and that, accordingly, attention to emerging sustainable development issues should not be to the detriment of attention to unresolved socio-economic and environmental problems.

The United Nation Environment Programme (UNEP), for its part, should continue to provide environmental inputs for decision-making in the area of sustainable development; its strengthening and provision with adequate, predictable budgetary resources are therefore imperative.

We renew our countries' commitment to promoting joint action for the effective implementation of the agreements and Plan of Action of the Summit of

the Americas on Sustainable Development, adopted at Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, in December 1996.

These agreements constitute a starting point for a hemisphere-wide position on sustainable development - the cornerstone of a cooperative alliance among the States of the Americas in their common search for a better quality of life for their peoples, based on integrated, mutually reinforcing economic, social and environmental objectives.

We also value the efforts made at the regional, subregional and national levels through the adoption of policies and strategies intended to achieve sustainable development.